

Essay: The Truth about Wars by Elton Tylenda

The following essay has been a handout in my classes since early 2004. I wrote it as a counter to the utter nonsense with no basis in fact, still being taught to school children as "US history" Knowing and telling the truth about wars is a major step toward peace.

Excerpts from, and reflections on: "Flyboys" by James Bradley (Little Brown And Co.2003)

The following historical snippets highlight some of the unconscious repeating patterns and processes that lead us to war including: racism, myth-making that's literalized and glorified, and the creation of a loathsome "enemy" by projecting our own "shadow side" and dehumanizing the "other." The means of war are essentially similar across the board. The picture we paint of the "enemy" becomes a mirror image of ourselves. The following details contrast sharply with the history I was taught in grade school. A few years ago, public outcry dissuaded Japan from deleting all references to its bloody invasion of China from its grade school history books.

The US, in violation of its own treaty, stole land from Native Americans and carved into their sacred mountain a "pulpit in stone" to commemorate the chief ethnic cleansers - Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt. The four presidents had referred to Native Americans variously as: "wolves," "savages," "a wholly alien race," "red devils" and so on. T. Roosevelt said: "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth."

The majority of Native Americans were already exterminated when the US went on to invade the Philippines and slaughter over a quarter million of the inhabitants there. One general's written clarification to a junior officer in the field read: kill all those above "ten years of age." A nationally published story about the massacre of a thousand civilians in the town of Titatia included a soldier's letter home that read in part: "I am probably growing hard-hearted, for I am in my glory when I can sight my gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger. Tell all my inquiring friends that I am doing everything I can for Old Glory and for America I love so well." Senator Joseph Burton defended the slaughter as "entirely within the regulations of civilized warfare" by citing earlier massacres of Native Americans as precedent. No one in the Senate challenged his "reasoning" - (similar absurdities went unchallenged re: Vietnam and Iraq).

The killing of Filipino prisoners of war was official US policy and the standard army torture of the day was called the "water cure." America replaced the oppressor and adopted the same

methods - widespread torture, concentration camps, the killing of disarmed prisoners and helpless civilians - but with a ruthlessness that surpassed even that of the Spanish" (JB). Spain's brutality against civilians had been the rationale for the US invasion. President Teddy Roosevelt had this to say when the slaughter "officially" ended in 1902: after hailing "The bravery of American soldiers" who fought "for the triumph of civilization over the black chaos of savagery and barbarism," he declared it "the most glorious war in the nation's history".

A few decades later (in retaliation for the first US bombing of its cities), Japan razed 20,000 square miles of Eastern China, and slaughtered a quarter million of its inhabitants. They also sprayed bio-agents including cholera, typhoid, and bubonic plague. Japanese killed prisoners as a matter of course and their standard torture technique was also the "water cure." US flyboys, in this case the "Doolittle Raiders" and the Chinese who aided them where they ditched their planes, were referred to as kichiku (devils) and pigs. Some of the prisoners were rendered into meat rations for Japanese soldiers.

Japan's newspapers of the day kept the folks back home amused with stories from the China front. One headline read: "Contest to cut down a hundred! (by chopping off their heads). Two second lieutenants already up to eighty." A follow up headline read: "It's 89 - 78 in the 'Contest to cut down a hundred' a close race, how heroic!" And finally: "Contest to cut down a hundred goes over the top, M - 106, N - 105. Pair plans to extend contest." The "barbarous" Japanese also bombed Nanking from the air killing 2000 civilians. Newspapers around the world expressed the shock felt by "civilized" folks:

"This government holds the view that any general bombing... (of civilian areas) is contrary to principles of law and of humanity." (US State Dept.) "...public opinion in the US regards such methods as barbarous." (Secretary Hull) "The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians...has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and women, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity." (FDR) The League...expresses its profound distress at the loss of life caused to innocent civilians...and declares that no excuse can be made for such acts..." (League of Nations) "No nation has a right in law or in morality to bomb crowded cities from the air and to make war indiscriminately upon noncombatants and combatants alike." (Britain)

A few years after the above headlines circled the globe, the US fire-bombed Tokyo: "the largest single day killing in world history...the dead would surpass the later atomic toll at Nagasaki. Only Hiroshima would see more - slightly more - dead." Brigadier General Bonner Fellers described it as "one of the most ruthless and barbaric killings of non-combatants in all history." US propaganda of the day depicted "Japs" as lice, inferring a rationale for extermination.

General Curtis LeMay, the architect of that fire bombing, later wrote: "We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9-10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined." He later reflected: "If I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal." After Japan lost the war, some of the perpetrators were executed for war crimes. But major culprits like Emperor Hirohito, the Nazi-like experimenters and those involved in bio-warfare became US allies in the newly established "peace" called "cold war."

I knew none of the above history when, as an army draftee, I landed in Vietnam in 1968. General LeMay was still orchestrating fire bombings of civilians there. We killed as many Vietnamese as the Japanese had before us and Agent Orange horribly afflicted millions more. The execution of wounded/captured Viet Cong by American soldiers was widespread and even televised. The standard torture for prisoners was still the "water cure." Ten years of slaughter, the My Lai massacre (one of many committed by American troops) and losing the war notwithstanding, no American was ruled a war criminal. Vietnamese were disparagingly called Gooks, a term carried over from the still ongoing Korean War. In a single lifetime we've "progressed" from the bloody "war to end wars" to the current and bloody war without end. And depleted uranium may prove to be deadlier than Agent Orange.

M. L. King Jr. noted: "if you succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos." He rejected the view that we are destined to remain "...tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war..." affirming instead, "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word." Sadly most "religious leaders" back then, like most today, got suckered into promoting the violence of unjust and illegal wars. Currently not enough of us have risen to King's level of wisdom, courage and eloquence for peace to reign.

